

Message Text

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ACTION EB-07

INFO OCT-01 ARA-06 ISO-00 L-02 CAB-02 CIAE-00 COME-00

DODE-00 DOTE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00 FAA-00 /025 W

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P R 241315Z MAR 75

FM AMEMBASSY BRASILIA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8263

INFO AMCONSUL RIO DE JANEIRO

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E.O.11652: N/A

TAGS: EAIR, BR

SUBJECT: PANAM CHANGE OF GAUGE

REF: A. STATE 49614 B. RIO 564

1. SUMMARY: FONOFF HAS ADVISED EMBASSY THAT AIR MINISTER HAS ORDERED CIVIL AVIATION DEPARTMENT TO CEASE ALL INTERNATIONAL FLIGHTS TO CONGONHAS AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. EMBASSY REQUESTS REVISION OF TEXT (WHICH WAS PREPARED IN DEPARTMENT) TO TAKE ACCOUNT OF THIS DEVELOPMENT, IF DEPARTMENT STILL WISHES TO PROCEED WITH NOTE AS EMBASSY RECOMMENDS. END SUMMARY.

2. ON MARCH 12, ECON COUNSELOR DISCUSSED PRESENTATION REFTTEL (A) WITH AMBASSADOR CABRAL DE MELLO, HEAD FONOFF ECONOMIC DEPARTMENT. CABRAL DE MELLO SAID THAT PROBLEM BEING RESOLVED AND REQUESTED THAT EMBASSY DISCUSS SPECIFICS WITH HIS TECHNICAL STAFF BEFORE DELIVERY OF NOTE. HE ALSO SAID TONE OF PRESENTATION SEEMED HARSH, IN VIEW OF FACT THAT PROBLEM WAS MOVING TOWARD SOLUTION.

3. ON MARCH 13 (FOLLOWING UP EARLIER MEETING MARCH 7 AS WELL AS CABRAL DE MELLO'S REQUEST), EMBOFF MET WITH COUNSELOR HELCIO TAVARES PIRES, HEAD OF ECON DEPARTMENT'S TRANSPORTATION DEVISION, FOR REVIEW OF SITUATION. PIRES OFFICIALLY ADVISED EMBOFF (BASED ON INFORMATION PROVIDED TO FONOFF BY GENERAL
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DEOCLECIO SIGUIERA, HEAD OF BRAZIL'S CIVIL AVIATION DEPARTMENT) THAT

MINISTER OF AERONAUTICS HAS ORDERED CIVIL AVIATION DEPARTMENT (DAC) TO "CEASE ALL INTERNATIONAL FLIGHTS TO AND FROM CONGONHAS AS SOON AS POSSIBLE." IMPLEMENTATION EXPECTED NO LATER THAN JUNE 30. DAC ALSO INTENDS, CONCURRENTLY WITH TERMINATION OF INTERNATIONAL FLIGHTS, TO REQUIRE VARIG TO ESTABLISH PORT OF ENTRY CHECK-IN POINTS IN RIO AND PORTO ALEGRE.

4. MINISTER'S DECISION ALSO REPORTED IN JORNAL DO BRASIL MARCH 12. PAPER SAYS MINISTRY "...PLANS TO WITHDRAW FROM CONGONHAS, NO LATER THAN JULY, ALL INTERNATIONAL FLIGHTS, WHICH WILL HENCEFORTH TO TO VIRACOPOS, WHERE IMPROVEMENT AND EXPANSION WILL SHORTLY BE INITIATED."

5. ACTION PLANNED BY GOB DOES NOT FULLY MEET REQUIREMENTS STIPULATED IN US NOTE -- THAT PANAM BE PERMITTED TO FLY INTO CONGONHAS PENDING TERMINATION OF ALL INTERNATIONAL FLIGHTS -- BUT EMBASSY SEES VIRTUALLY NO CHANCE THAT GOB WILL AGREE TO PERMIT PANAM TO DO SO. PROSPECTIVE ACTION BY GOB, WHILE IT WOULD SOLVE PANAM PROBLEM, IS PART OF BROADER GOB EFFORT TO RESTRICT ACTIVITY AT CONGONHAS IN ORDER TO DEAL WITH CONGESTION AT THAT AIRPORT AND RESULTING SAFETY, NOISE, AND POLLUTION PROBLEMS.

5. PRESENTATION OF REVISED NOTE WOULD HAVE ADVANTAGE OF MAINTAINING PRESSURE ON GOB. THIS MAY BE DESIRABLE, DESPITE GOB ASSURANCES THAT PROBLEM IS BEING SOLVED, BECAUSE:
(A) GOB HAS STATED ON VARIOUS OCCASIONS DURING RECENT YEARS THAT INTERNATIONAL OPERATIONS WOULD BE SHIFTED TO VIRACOPOS, BUT THE PROMISED MOVE DID NOT OCCUR, WE HAVE NO GUARANTEE, GIVEN ESPECIALLY RESISTANCE FROM CRUZEIRO DO SUL, THAT SHIFT WILL ACTUALLY TAKE PLACE BY JULY 1:
(B) ASSUMING THAT SHIFT DOES OCCUR AS SCHEDULED, VARIG MIGHT STILL DESIGN A TRAFFIC OPERATION THAT CIRCUMVENTS THE EFFECTS OF THE TRANSFER. WE SHOULD HOLD OPEN THE POSSIBILITY OF DISCUSSING ANY SUCH EVENTUALITY WHICH GIVES VARIG A COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE:
(C) ALTHOUGH CHANGE OF GAUGE ISSUE MAY NOT NOW BE PERTINENT GIVEN SHIFT TO VIRACOPOS, WE MAY STILL WISH TO DISCUSS THIS ISSUE IN ORDER TO OBTAIN CLARIFICATION OF OUR TWO VIEWPOINTS. IT IS CONCEIVABLE THAT FUTURE CHANGE OF GAUGE WITHIN BRAZIL LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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WILL BE SOUGHT WHEN AND IF PANAM INITIATES OPERATIONS TO PORTO ALEGRE:

(D) IF WE PROCEED TO BILATERAL DISCUSSIONS ON CHANGE OF GAUGE, WE MAY WISH TO DISCUSS OTHER PERTINENT AVIATION ISSUES, SUCH AS BLOCKAGE OF PANAM REMITTANCES AND TRANS-INTERNATIONAL AIRWAYS' REQUEST FOR TAX EXEMPTION ON ITS FUEL PURCHASES.

6. ON BALANCE, EMBASSY BELIEVES USG SHOULD PROCEED WITH
PRESENTATION OF REVISED NOTE, TAKING INTO ACCOUNT ASSURANCES
PROVIDED BY GOB AND POSSIBLE FUTURE PROBLEMS SET FORTH
PARA 5 ABOVE. IF DEPARTMENT AGREES, REQUEST REVISED NOTE FOR EARLY
PRESENTATION.
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